TRANSLATING KINSHIP AND CARE: THE KORPACHA AS CULTURAL SYMBOL

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Abstract. This article examines the translation of korpacha — a traditional Uzbek quilted mattress carrying deep cultural connotations of maternal care, domestic warmth, and communal intimacy — across its key occurrences in O'tkir Hoshimov's autobiographical novel Dunyoning Ishlari and its English translation Such Is Life. Applying Mona Baker's theory of equivalence above word level and Eugene Nida's dynamic equivalence, the study demonstrates that the term resists literal translation because its cultural meaning operates through connotation and narrative context rather than denotation alone. The translator's decisions to render korpacha through descriptive paraphrase, functional substitution, and contextual adaptation reflect pragmatic strategies aimed at reproducing the emotional effect of the original for English-speaking readers.

Keywords: Dunyoning Ishlari, korpacha, pragmatic equivalence, dynamic equivalence, culture-bound terms, domestication, Uzbek-English literary translation, maternal symbolism.

Introduction

Korpacha is among the most quietly significant objects in Uzbek domestic culture. A hand-sewn quilted mattress or thin blanket, it serves simultaneously as furniture, bedding, and a marker of domestic hospitality. In Hoshimov's Dunyoning Ishlari, the korpacha appears in several charged narrative moments as an object through which the mother's love, physical sacrifice, and protective instinct are made tangible. When, for example, the narrator recalls his mother wrapping him in a korpacha and carrying him through a blizzard to find medical help, the object condenses an entire set of meanings: warmth against danger, maternal body as shield, domestic material culture deployed in a moment of crisis.

The English translation Such Is Life faces a genuine difficulty here. The word "quilt" or "blanket" captures the physical object but loses the cultural specificity. "Mattress" suggests something too static and functional. No English word carries the precise social and emotional register of korpacha in its domestic Uzbek context. The translation choices made across the novel's several occurrences of the term therefore constitute a set of pragmatic decisions worth examining in detail.

The theoretical foundation for this analysis rests on Baker's argument that equivalence in translation must be sought at the level of the text's communicative and cultural context rather than at the level of the individual word. As Baker observes, the meaning of an item in translation frequently depends more upon its collocational and cultural environment than upon its dictionary definition (Baker M. "In Other Words". –London: Routledge, 1992. – B.74). Nida's dynamic equivalence framework similarly holds that translation should aim at reproducing equivalent reader response rather than formal correspondence (Nida E. "Toward a Science of Translating". –Leiden: Brill, 1964. – B.159).

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Cultural Significance of Korpacha in Uzbek Domestic Life

The korpacha occupies a central position in Uzbek material culture that has no direct analogue in English domestic life. Made by hand from layers of cotton wadding stitched between woven fabric, it functions as a seat, a sleeping surface, and a surface for communal dining when placed on a supa or floor. Its preparation by women of the household is itself a culturally meaningful act: a bride's ability to sew korpacha is a recognized marker of domestic competence, and gifting a korpacha carries significance in lifecycle events such as weddings and births.

Within Dunyoning Ishlari, the korpacha appears in several emotionally weighted passages. Its most powerful occurrence is in the chapter "The Woolen Socks" (Gilam Paypoq), where the narrator recalls being gravely ill as a child and his mother wrapping him in a korpacha before carrying him through the snow. In the Uzbek source text, the object is named simply and without elaboration, because it requires none — every Uzbek reader understands immediately what it represents. In translation, however, the object must be explained or approximated, and that process inevitably involves a choice about how much cultural information to carry into the target text.

Analysis of Translation Strategies

The English translation of Dunyoning Ishlari handles korpacha through a combination of strategies that vary according to narrative context and communicative function.

Descriptive Paraphrase

In the blizzard scene from "The Woolen Socks," the translation renders the korpacha as a quilted blanket with a brief explanatory note in the footnotes identifying it as a traditional Uzbek sleeping mattress. This approach reflects what Nida would describe as a formal departure from the source in service of dynamic equivalence: the English reader receives an approximation of the object's physical nature along with a contextual clue about its cultural origin, allowing the emotional weight of the passage — the mother's desperate warmth against the cold — to land without being distorted by an opaque untranslated term (Nida E. "Toward a Science of Translating". –Leiden: Brill, 1964. – B.166).

Transliteration with Footnote

In other occurrences where the korpacha appears as part of a domestic scene rather than a moment of crisis, the translation retains the Uzbek term and supplies a footnote. This strategy of borrowing with annotation is a common solution to the translation of realia, preserving the foreignness of the term while managing comprehension through paratext. Baker's framework supports this approach insofar as it maintains the cultural specificity of the source without sacrificing the reader's ability to construct meaning from the surrounding context (Baker M. "In Other Words". –London: Routledge, 1992. – B.53).

Functional Substitution

In one passage where the korpacha appears as a surface on which characters sit together, the translation uses "mat" — a word that captures the social function (shared seating on the floor) without the cultural specificity. This is the most domesticating strategy employed. Newmark would identify it as a communicative translation that prioritizes the target reader's comprehension over the source text's cultural texture (Newmark P. "A Textbook of Translation". –London: Prentice Hall, 1988).

Discussion

The range of strategies employed across the translation of korpacha illustrates a principle central to Baker's theory of equivalence above word level: that no single translation solution can adequately serve a culture-bound term in every context. Because korpacha carries different communicative functions — object of crisis care, marker of domestic hospitality, surface of communal gathering — its translation must be governed by each function rather than by a fixed lexical equivalent.

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Nida's dynamic equivalence framework helps to explain why the most emotionally charged occurrence, the blizzard scene, receives the most elaborated treatment. The goal of dynamic equivalence is to produce in the target reader a response as close as possible to that produced in the source reader (Nida E. "Toward a Science of Translating". –Leiden: Brill, 1964. – B.159). In that scene, the korpacha is not merely an object but the physical embodiment of maternal love under duress. An English reader who reads "quilted blanket" can still feel the warmth of that gesture, even without knowing the precise cultural identity of the object. The dynamic equivalent succeeds where a literal translation might have distanced the reader through cultural opacity.

G'aybulla Salomov's principle that literary translation must recreate not the surface forms of the original but its emotional and artistic influence aligns with this analysis (Salomov G'. "Tarjima Nazariyasiga Kirish". –Toshkent, 1978). The varying translations of korpacha across Such Is Life demonstrate precisely this principle: each choice is calibrated to the emotional and communicative demands of the passage rather than to formal consistency.

Conclusion

The analysis of korpacha across Dunyoning Ishlari and its English translation reveals how a single culture-bound object may require multiple translation strategies depending on its narrative function. The object's deepest cultural meaning — as a material expression of maternal care — is most successfully reproduced through descriptive paraphrase in emotionally critical passages, where dynamic equivalence demands that communicative effect take priority over cultural fidelity. In less charged contexts, transliteration with annotation preserves cultural texture without overwhelming comprehension. The study supports Baker's and Nida's shared insight that pragmatic adequacy, not formal correspondence, is the proper criterion of translational success for culture-specific literary imagery.

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